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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: October 23, 2006

OeVP: Inner-Party Criticism of Chancellor Schuessel

¶1. Massive criticism of OeVP party boss Wolfgang Schuessel and his leadership style is now heard among top party officials. Franz Fischler, formerly EU Commissioner and OeVP Minister of Agriculture, demanded a total reform of the party and President of the Austrian Economic Chamber Christoph Leitl called for new guidelines for the OeVP.

Three weeks after the general elections, the OeVP is "in turmoil," writes liberal daily Der Standard. Former EU Commissioner Franz Fischler complained about the party's "social indifference." He also criticized that in his view the OeVP had turned into a "rural party that has lost all traces of urbaneness." In addition, the Conservatives were "not political enough" any more, and had become a "receptacle for interest group representatives." Women, in particular, did no longer feel at home in the party, Fischler said.

Similarly, Economics Chamber President Christoph Leitl emphasized the OeVP needs new forms of organization, especially with regard to getting young people on board. As a "social integration party," the Conservatives should aim at "connecting all the socially relevant groups," and represent these manifold dimensions, Leitl argued. "New, ambitious goals require new, personable, faces," the Economics Chamber boss urged.

Bishop Calls for Guaranteed Basic Income

¶2. Bishop Ludwig Schwarz of the diocese Linz has attempted to position the Catholic Church in the current debate about a state-guaranteed basic income. The bishop of Upper Austria's capital Linz, Ludwig Schwarz, told mass-circulation daily Kurier he considers the Social Democrats' proposal regarding a state-guaranteed basic income a "good approach" and "something the political parties should seriously take into consideration," and even went a step further: According to his suggestion, everyone, regardless of their social situation and income, would be eligible for such a basic income. With this proposal, the Catholic Church has overtaken the SPOe on the left, the Kurier writes. Schwarz also pointed out that the gulf between rich and poor in Austria has widened. He stressed that it was the state's responsibility to assist the poor, "so that they may attain a standard of living in accordance with human dignity."

Coalition Negotiations Continue

¶3. This week, the coalition negotiations between SPOe and OeVP will

tackle some of the major points of controversy between the two parties: On Friday, the OeVP will present the latest figures on the state's financial situation, which the SPOe had demanded information on. Tomorrow, the committee on education will get together and discuss such hot topics as the introduction of a comprehensive school system for children aged 6 to 14. The SPOe wants to introduce this system all over Austria, while the OeVP is fiercely opposed to this idea.

Commentator Susanne Schnabl argues on ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal that this week's talks "could be the most significant so far. After all, money is the issue topping the agenda: a checking of the finances. The SPOe and the OeVP will meet on Friday, to discuss the country's financial situation. The figures were published last week, and according to Finance Minister Grassner, the deficit will continue to decline and is estimated to be at 1.1 percent GNP this year. Therefore, a major negotiation round will address the Austrian budget development until 2010 on Friday." The sub-committees' meetings this week also "promise to be interesting affairs," particularly the ones on social and family issues and on education, which are going to tackle controversial issues such as child allowances and comprehensive schools, where the SPOe and the OeVP hold very dissimilar positions, Schnabl says: "This is where two contrasting ideological concepts collide," and "a rapprochement can hardly be expected."

Putin Shows Europeans Cold Shoulder

14. Russia's President Vladimir Putin has rejected EU demands for energy guarantees.

While EU Commission President Barroso spoke of "mutual dependence" at the informal summit meeting of heads of state and government, the Russian President demanded changes in the energy charter, which Moscow signed in 1994, but has never ratified, says independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten. Barroso's approach, however, that the EU needs Russia as an energy supplier as much as Russia needs the Europeans as an industrial customer, is misleading, given the fact that Putin sees himself as the one calling the shots on the issue: After all, the EU depends on Russia for about 25 percent of its oil and gas supplies. Moreover, Russia has already demonstrated that it might play off its European customers against China. The Europeans, though, cannot in all cases fall back on alternatives to Russian oil and gas, which is why they are pushing Moscow to sign the so-called energy charter, in order to avoid similar unwelcome surprises as last winter, when Russia cut back on gas deliveries to Europe during its conflict with Ukraine, the daily explains.

Alleged Schedule for Iraq Puts Pressure on Bush

15. Leading members of the US Democrats have demanded that the President reveal his alleged schedule for further procedure in Iraq before the US Congressional elections on November 7. The President's plan ought to contain a timeframe for the US withdrawal from Iraq, Senator Carl Levin specified the request towards US TV station "Fox." According to Levin, the time plan is of great importance, because without it, the Iraqis will not do what they must do - namely "settle their differences," ORF online news says. Like all major Austrian media, ORF online suggests the American voters' dissatisfaction with the development in Iraq are the key reason for why the President and the Republican Party need to take into account the possible loss of their majority in Congress in November. Similarly, mass-circulation tabloid Kronen Zeitung headlines "George Bush might face defeat at home and throughout the world." The tabloid speculates that the mid-term elections "will not end well for Bush - in the future, he will no longer be able to govern without the Democrats, and will need to implement a drastic change of course." The American people "have long lost faith in their president," the Kronen Zeitung suggests, quoting from a recent survey by US magazine Newsweek, according to which 54 percent say the US-led invasion of Iraq was a mistake, and only 39 percent believe it was the right decision.

Freeway into Space

16. A new doctrine signed by President Bush is supposed to cement US

dominance in space, at the same time, it gives the administration the option of denying those powers that are "hostile to US interests" access to space.

Independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten writes that the revised "National Space Policy" marks a strategic shift in US space policy. Experts criticize the unilateralist claim that is inherent in the new doctrine, and warn that it could lead to a militarization of space. While experts do not deny the growing significance of space, they warn that the Bush administration may be trying to secure its already existing dominance in the area through military means. In addition, the Salzburger Nachrichten writes, Washington's approach to make sure that the US can "operate unhindered in space in order to defend our interests there," contrasts with a number of international agreements. The US government, however, has dismissed criticism that with its new doctrine it is paving the way for an arms race in space.

Celebrations Show Divisions in Hungary

[17](#). After 50 years, the Hungarian uprising continues to divide the Hungarian parties: The Socialists and the conservative Young Democrats are holding separate celebrations. It is the scandal around Prime Minister Gyurcsany's admission of lies that spoils the celebrations this year. The celebrations began on Sunday, and Austrian President Heinz Fischer, who attended together with other foreign dignitaries, gave a speech in the State Opera in Budapest, calling for "consensus" in Hungary, writes centrist daily Die Presse.

McCaw